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A Would-Be Turk: Louis XIV in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*

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Despite the large number of references to diplomatic blunders by the French during Süleyman Ağa's visit to Paris in 1669 and the charade-like character of much of Louis XIV's policies towards the Ottoman Empire during the period, few scholars have seen the humour in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* as directed towards the crown and court. In this article, I argue that Molière's comedy-ballet can be read as a pointed satire of how Hugues de Lionne, the foreign minister, and the king received the Ottoman envoy in their official audiences, and of French foreign policy with the Ottoman state itself. The mummery involved in Lionne's receiving Süleyman as the 'Grand Vizier' of France, and the king's pretence in expecting to be viewed as a crusading monarch while diligently pursuing commercial relations with the Porte, provided Molière with ample material for satirical development. The oriental trappings of the work, especially of the Turkish ceremony, might thus be considered as a means to mirror and criticize French governmental policies and behaviour rather than as a proto-colonialist attempt imaginatively to represent the Ottoman Turk.

KEYWORDS Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Louis XIV, Ottoman Empire, Süleyman Ağa, Hugues de Lionne, orientalism

As the number of interpretations well attests, one of the essential questions that Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* presents to the viewer is: who is being satirized? In the preface to *Le Tartuffe*, Molière argues that, 'Les plus beaux traits d'une sérieuse morale sont moins puissants, le plus souvent, que ceux de la satire; et rien ne reprend mieux la plupart des hommes que la peinture de leurs défauts.'¹ Clearly, if this definition of the purpose of satire is used, the point of the comedy-ballet could not be to reprove Süleyman Ağa, since he was no longer in Paris at the moment of the first performance. Although the envoy's visit was most certainly a highly

¹ Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Georges Couton, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), I, 885. All further quotations from Molière's work will be to this edition.

mediated event and the proximate occasion for the creation of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, the themes explored within the comedy-ballet seem more intimately connected to the broader political context of the time and most especially to the duplicitous, masked nature of France's foreign policy towards the Ottomans.

Two critical traditions have survived concerning the initial reception of the comedy-ballet at court. Grimarest, Molière's first, though often unreliable, biographer, claimed that

Jamais pièce n'a été plus malheureusement reçue que celle là; et aucune de celles de Molière ne lui a donné tant de déplaisir. Le Roi ne lui en dit pas un mot à son souper: et tous les Courtisans la mettoient en morceaux. [...] Il se passa cinq jours avant que l'on représentât cette pièce pour la seconde fois; et pendant ces cinq jours, Molière, tout mortifié, se tint caché dans sa chambre. [...] Toute la Cour étoit révoltée.²

The second tradition, however, emphasizes the great success of the work, 'one that remained among Louis XIV's favourite entertainments throughout his life'.³ And indeed contemporary sources do not mention any difficulties connected with the first performances. In fact, a notice in the *Gazette* (25 October 1670, p. 1024) indicates that the comedy-ballet was performed four times in quick succession: 14, 16, 20 and 21 October,⁴ and other contemporary sources do not mention the king's displeasure with the work. Whatever the accuracy of Grimarest's account of the first performance at court, it is clear that *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* never became a play popular with the king and that 1670 marks a decline of Molière's status at court. For the period 1682–1715 when the court became permanently established at Versailles, out of 1,200 theatrical representations a third (416) were works by only three authors: Molière (166), Corneille (139), and Racine (111). Among Molière's works performed at court, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* remained, in Beaussant's apt phrase, 'dans la roture' with only two performances at Versailles in over 30 years.⁵ This tradition may indicate that at some level the king and the upper nobility were displeased, if not offended, with the comedy-ballet.

A possible explanation for any displeasure with the work may be that the king and court viewed themselves as a primary target of the play's satire due to the large number of references related to the king, court, and royal policy that it contains. Thus, Grimarest's account of displeasure may be true. At the same time, the king may not have made a great show of his displeasure, taking to heart Uranie's advice to Climène in *La Critique de l'école des femmes*:

Toutes les peintures ridicules qu'on expose sur les théâtres doivent être regardées sans chagrin de tout le monde. Ce sont miroirs publics, où il ne faut jamais témoigner qu'on se voie; et c'est se taxer hautement d'un défaut, que se scandaliser qu'on le reprenne (I, 658).

² J.-L. Le Gallois, Sieur de Grimarest, *La vie de Mr de Molière* (Paris, 1705; repr. Paris: Isidore Liseux, 1877), pp. 141–42.

³ John S. Powell, 'Le Bourgeois gentilhomme: Molière and Music', in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière*, ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 121–38 (p. 121).

⁴ Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière, *Œuvres de Molière*, Les Grands écrivains de la France, ed. by Eugène Despois and Paul Mesnard, 13 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1883), VIII, 6.

⁵ Philippe Beaussant, *Les plaisirs de Versailles: Théâtre et musique* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), p. 82.

References to royal authority appear from the very opening of the comedy-ballet. All of the tutors that Jourdain employs, the music master, the philosopher, the fencing master, the tailor, and most especially the dance master, hint at royal pretensions, and in each instance his attempts at courtly elegance fail miserably. This may be most apparent in the music master's scene where Jourdain endeavours to dance the minuet using music from *Les Amants magnifiques*, performed only a few months previously in February 1670. This was the first work of Molière-Lully in which the king, though scheduled to dance the part of Neptune and Apollo, almost certainly did not do so, having practiced his role 'au point de s'en rendre malade'.⁶ As Fleck notes, 'By the consummately demanding nature of his chosen dance [the aristocratic minuet], and by the origin of the tune employed [from *Les Amants magnifiques*], Jourdain is implicitly aping the very highest of all possible nobility, the king himself.'⁷ There may be another level of satire in this scene, since, as Louis E. Auld has observed, Jourdain's preference for a song with 'du mouton dedans' is a spoof of the work and aesthetic theories of Pierre Perrin (1620–1675). Louis had just accorded the royal *privilege* for creating *Académies d'opéra* to Perrin in June of 1669 before finally giving a renewed privilege for the *Académie royale de musique* to Lully in 1672 after Perrin's fall into debt and disgrace.⁸ By satirizing the king's choice, the play may be indirectly criticizing the king himself.

In claiming that all problems, including political and military ones, can be solved through dance, the dance master provides another reference to royal authority (II, 717). Although within the context of the comedy-ballet such overstated claims appear to be comic, the arguments closely follow those of the *Lettres patentes du roy pour l'établissement de l'Académie Royale de Danse en la ville de Paris* (1663), where dance is recognized as one of the most 'honnêtes & plus nécessaires' arts to prepare the body to bear arms. It is a useful art for the nobility not only for royal entertainments but also in times of war.⁹ Dorante invites Mme Jourdain to such a royal entertainment, even promising her the best seats in the house. A royal entertainment in fact is recreated at the end of the comedy-ballet in the *Ballet des nations* where arguments occur over priority in seating, and such a *ballet de cour* was the art form most intimately connected to the king himself.¹⁰ The question of seating was also played out in disagreements concerning the precedence of French over Spanish ambassadors and the retention of 'préséance' for the French ambassador at the Porte in the 1660s.¹¹

⁶ Cited in Philippe Beaussant, *Louis XIV artiste* (Paris: Payot, 1999), p. 167.

⁷ Stephen H. Fleck, *Molière's Comedy-Ballets: A Dramatic and Musical Analysis* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993), pp. 178–79.

⁸ Louis E. Auld, 'Une rivalité sournoise: Molière contre Pierre Perrin', in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme: Problèmes de la comédie-ballet*, ed. by Volker Kapp, *Biblio* 17, 67 (Paris, Seattle, Tübingen: PFSCCL, 1993), pp. 123–37.

⁹ *Lettres patentes du roy pour l'établissement de l'Académie Royale de Danse en la ville de Paris* (Paris: Chez Pierre le Petit, 1663), p. 4.

¹⁰ Woodrough has gone so far as to argue that 'organising a *comédie-ballet* in one's private home could lead to the charge of secondary "lèse-majesté divine et humaine", punishable by imprisonment for life'. Elizabeth Woodrough, 'Cantate, Ballate, Ridete: Molière's Response to the Threat of Ceremonial Overkill in the Age of Louis XIV', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 25 (2003), 169–82 (p. 179).

¹¹ David J. Sturdy, *Louis XIV* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 131; Pierre Duparc, *Recueil des instructions données aux ambassadeurs et ministres de France depuis les traités de Westphalie jusqu'à la Révolution française* (Paris: CNRS, 1969), XXIX: *Turquie*, 21–22.

The concern over Süleyman Ağa's rank was connected with a desire for 'préséance': to the king's mind, the greatest Muslim Emperor and the greatest Christian 'Padişah' should send each other full ambassadors of equal rank.¹² The tradition within diplomatic correspondence between the French court and the Porte was for the king to be addressed as 'emperor'. This nicety of diplomatic protocol provides a real-life illustration of a (hyper)-sensitivity to the acquisition of make-believe titles. The attempts to belittle Süleyman, especially in his two audiences with Hugues de Lionne, the foreign minister, were intended to rebuke Ottoman 'haughtiness' (i.e., Ottoman refusal to recognize French 'préséance') primarily through seating. In the first audience, when Rives (likely Luc de Rives, a relative of de Lionne's wife, a 'maître ordinaire en la Chambre des Comptes', and one of de Lionne's 'commis'), who was acting as Lionne's 'kāhya', greeted Süleyman, they sat down on chairs of equal height and were served coffee in Turkish fashion. Finally, Süleyman was brought before Lionne, after being forced to wait an inordinate amount of time. Lionne sat down on a daybed raised on a dais covered with a rich Persian rug; Süleyman was brought a small stool to sit on that was pointedly placed beyond the borders of the carpet.¹³

In *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, the chatty old bourgeois couple is likewise dismayed when the best seats in the house have been given to 'les gens de Lantriguet' (II, 781), just as the king was outraged when the best 'seats' at the Porte had not been given to the French. The gravity of the affront is underscored by having Bretons in the front row. Even in the nineteenth century, Brittany retained a reputation for being a backward, savage place: 'Les pommes de terre pour les cochons, les épluchures pour les Bretons'.¹⁴ The pique felt by the bourgeois from the 'quartier du Palais-Royal' in seeing their 'rightful' place taken by upstarts from Brittany or elsewhere — upstarts who cannot even speak 'proper' French — comically highlights the king's and court's pique with Süleyman, an upstart whose behaviour would not confirm their notion of their own pre-eminence. What makes the situation potentially comic is the gap between appearance and reality, between perceived and real worth. The satire comes from French powerlessness before the Ottomans rather than from any real position of authority. The king and his ministers attempt to impose their own sense of self-importance on others who have power to resist.

Perhaps the most egregious example of this was Lionne's charade of playing the role of grand vizier, a position of much greater authority than a foreign minister in France, in his first audience with Süleyman Ağa. Even the king and court apparently viewed the stunt as out of place, since Lionne was forced to explain at length in his second meeting with Süleyman that he was only a 'petit Secrétaire de Sa Majesté Imperiale'¹⁵ and not the grand vizier. D'Arvieux indicates that he thought the minister's long-winded description of his duties as foreign minister was out of place, 'mais je crois que c'étoit une espece de satisfaction qu'il avoit crû devoir donner à ses

¹² Françoise Karro, 'La Cérémonie turque du *Bourgeois gentilhomme*', in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme: Problèmes de la comédie-ballet*, pp. 35–93 (p. 61).

¹³ Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires du chevalier d'Arvieux, envoyé extraordinaire du Roy à la Porte*, ed. by P. Labat, 6 vols (Paris: Charles-Jean-Baptiste de Lespine le fils, 1735), IV, 133–35.

¹⁴ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 6.

¹⁵ D'Arvieux, IV, 147.

Colleagues, qui s'étoient formalisés de ce qu'il faisoit la figure de Grand Visir'.¹⁶ This masquerade of attempting to appear more powerful than one was in reality would be dramatically highlighted in the 'querelle du sofa' when in 1677 the new French ambassador Nointel was unable to force the Ottomans into allowing the French to maintain their traditionally prestigious seating position during audiences with the sultan.¹⁷

The *Ballet des nations* involves other elements pointing back to that comic 'mascarade' in which Lionne pretended to be the grand vizier (II, 757). The pseudo-dialect of the Gascons and Swiss as they shout for a copy of the ballet program recalls a moment of linguistic pretence and posturing earlier in the comedy-ballet when Covielle acts as 'translator', claiming to understand Turkish 'perfectly' (II, 766–7). This scene in turn evokes the translation difficulties that marred Lionne's first meeting with Süleyman. Lionne did not trust M. de la Fontaine, Süleyman's dragoman, since it was rumoured that he was working in the pay of Denis de la Haye-Vantelet, the current French ambassador at the Porte, who was seeking to retain his position. However, the court's translator, François Pétis de la Croix (the elder, 1622–1695), was unable to interpret the discussions since he had learned Turkish only from books and was unable to understand what the envoy said. The French translator 'ne fit que bredouïiller de telle sorte, que l'Envoyé ne put rien comprendre dans ce qu'il lui dit; ce qui fut cause que l'audience finit bien plutôt qu'elle n'auroit dû faire'.¹⁸ The scenes from the comedy-ballet thus highlight the hollowness of French claims for linguistic competence in Oriental languages; Colbert would attempt to remedy this situation by instituting a school of oriental languages in 1669 for students called the 'jeunes de langue'.¹⁹

The tailor is a final figure from the beginning of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* who highlights the connection between the events in the comedy-ballet and the king. The scene appears to be a parody of the *lever du roi*, since Jourdain's new clothes have 'les fleurs enbas', which may represent the inverted *fleurs de lis*, and, like the king, he is dressed 'en cadence' and 'avec cérémonie' (II, 732). However, the scene also provides a more direct entry into issues surrounding Franco-Ottoman relations: the renewal of the capitulations in which the French cloth trade was a primary consideration. The course of French-Ottoman relations was set by François I when he decided to make an alliance with the Ottoman Empire in 1525. Although the capitulations seem to have been officially accepted by the Ottomans only in 1569, the broad lines of François I's policy are clear from the beginning: to establish an effective military alliance to fight Charles V, to monopolize east-west trade, and to set up the French as protectors of Christians and of Christian religious sites in Ottoman territories. The capitulations were thus thoroughly modern in the sense that secular concerns — political-military and economic — trumped religious ones (i.e., Muslims and Christians could form alliances for practical purposes). What seemed so shocking to many contemporaries of both François I and Louis XIV was the Machiavellian

¹⁶ D'Arvieux, IV, 150.

¹⁷ Duparc, *Recueil*, p. xv; Albert Vandal, *L'Odyssée d'un ambassadeur: Les Voyages du Marquis de Nointel (1670–1680)* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1900), pp. 219–32.

¹⁸ D'Arvieux, IV, 136–7.

¹⁹ Marie de Testa and Antoine Gautier, *Drogmans et diplomates européens auprès de la Porte ottomane* (Istanbul: Les Éditions Isis, 2003), pp. 43–46.

nature of these agreements. Worldly concerns consistently won over religious ones. It appeared to many to be a world turned, like the flowers of Jourdain's clothing, upside-down. The religious and military questions will be examined later, but for the moment I would like to look at economic questions.

French trade with the Ottomans suffered greatly during the course of the seventeenth century. By mid-century, French trade had declined from a 'peak of 1000 ships under Henry IV' to approximately thirty ships.²⁰ There were many causes for this state of affairs: wars of religion in Europe and the difficulties of the *Frondes*, attrition of the fleet through corsair activity, increased competition in the cloth market from the English and Dutch, inept French diplomacy, the poor quality of French cloth, the possibility for French merchants of making larger profits by fobbing off debased coinage on the currency-strapped Ottomans rather than actually engaging in trade, and, not least, Louis XIV's own duplicitous dealings with the Porte. In instructing Haye-Vantelet, Louis listed his concerns in the following order: (1) protection of Catholicism and religious sites in the east, (2) commerce, and (3) political affairs.²¹ However, the king indicated that only religion and political affairs would be addressed in the first instructions, with economic issues in supplementary instructions. The listing seems to indicate that religious concerns are of the highest importance, yet if one is to judge by the space devoted to the topics, it becomes clear that economic considerations are foremost in the king's mind. The first instructions dealing with religion and politics are thirteen pages long, whereas the supplemental instructions are nearly double that length at twenty-two pages.²²

To remedy the poor state of French trade in the Levant, Louis put Colbert in charge of rebuilding the navy as a tool of French mercantilist policy. In part, this included the creation of a galley fleet beginning in the 1660s.²³ The galleys, although having restricted military-economic value, served an important, though ambiguous, public-relations function. Since the time of François I, France was criticized for aiding the enemies of Christianity. This situation was only made worse by the condemnation of Protestants to galley service, the number of condemnations peaking in the years following the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685 and the War of the League of Augsburg (1689–97). However, the galleys were also used to capture Muslim slaves who could be valuable in negotiations to redeem French captives in Ottoman lands and who were, more importantly, a popular symbol of crusading.²⁴ This resonance was strengthened by using the Knights of St John to command the galleys. Particularly within France itself, local preachers could present the king as a crusading monarch befitting his status as first son of the Church. This imagery of the Knights of St John was also used during Lionne's talks with Süleyman Ağa, when the foreign minister was dressed in long black satin robes adorned with the Maltese cross of the Order of the Holy Spirit, the very cross that symbolized the Knights Hospitalier.

²⁰ Philip McCluskey, 'Commerce Before Crusade? France, the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary Pirates (1661–1669)', *French History*, 23 (2009), 1–21 (p. 5).

²¹ Duparc, *Recueil*, pp. 12–13.

²² Duparc, *Recueil*, pp. 11–24; pp. 25–47.

²³ Paul W. Bamford, *Fighting Ships and Prisons: The Mediterranean Galleys of France in the Age of Louis XIV* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), pp. 18–21.

²⁴ Bamford, *Fighting Ships*, pp. 6–7.

The question of commerce is of course essential to the comedy-ballet. It is money earned through the cloth trade that has enabled Jourdain to put on a grand show. And yet precisely this fact remains the open secret of the play. Covielle in particular both emphasizes and hides this fact when he insists that Jourdain's father was *not* a cloth merchant but simply an obliging chap who knew fabrics well, sought them out from all parts, brought them to his house, and sold them to his friends for money (II, 766). This same logic governs both Dorante's and Jourdain's disinterested 'friendship' (II, 740) and the 'ferme et sincère amitié et bonne correspondance' of Franco-Ottoman relations.²⁵ Although there is no need for 'cérémonie' (II, 741) between such great friends as Dorante and Jourdain, Jourdain has in fact kept a 'petit mémoire' of the amounts he has lent the count. Several items listed in his accounts are relevant in the present context. Dorante gave 1832 livres for feathers (approximately 12% of the total amount), 2780 livres to his tailor (approximately 18%), and a little over 3379 livres to his *marchand* (approximately 22%). One other commodity is relevant: the diamond that Jourdain bought for the marquise, a diamond, which according to Dorante, will have an 'effet admirable' on her (II, 745).

A little over a month after Süleyman's first audience with Lionne, the Ottoman envoy met with the king at the Château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. As in his meetings with Lionne, Süleyman was led through a richly decorated gallery intended to impress the visitor before arriving at the reception room. There, a silver-plated wooden throne, 'très enrichi de sculpture', had been set up rather than the imitation *divan* used by Lionne; in fact, this was the first 'throne' to be used by Louis XIV.²⁶ In all accounts of the meeting, a consistently emphasized feature is the king's dress: an 'habit de brocard d'or [...] tellement couvert de diamans, qu'il sembloit être environné de lumieres; son chapeau avoit un bouquet de plumes blanches, avec une agraffe de gros diamans'.²⁷ What appeared to wound French pride above all else was that the *soleil*-like brilliance of the diamonds and plumage did not have an admirable effect on Süleyman.²⁸ In fact, according to some reports (probably erroneous), Süleyman was overheard to comment that the sultan's horses paraded more diamonds than the king.²⁹

Although the diamonds may not have affected Süleyman, they did appear to have their intended effect upon Dorimène, the marquise of the comedy-ballet. Dorante assures Jourdain that women love above all else the 'dépenses qu'on fait pour elles' (II, 746). The relationship between commerce and love is consistently emphasized in the sense discussed above throughout the text. For example, shortly after introducing the diamond in scene 6 of Act III, Dorante calls attention to his disinterestedness in serving his friend by pointing out that he has 'commerce' with Dorimène, that

²⁵ Duparc, *Recueil*, p. 19.

²⁶ Béatrix Saule, 'Insignes du pouvoir et usages de cour à Versailles sous Louis XIV', *Bulletin du Centre de recherche du château de Versailles*, 'Objets et insignes du Pouvoir' (2005) {<http://crcv.revues.org/index132.html>} [accessed 29 August 2009] (para. 11 of 46).

²⁷ D'Arvieux, IV, 159.

²⁸ According to Woodrough, Louis XIV spent, in the very year that Süleyman Ağa visited the court, the equivalent of seventy-one million livres for a collection of precious stones, including the infamous Hope diamond, from Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (p. 180).

²⁹ Despois and Mesnard, *Œuvres de Molière*, VIII, 10.

'marquise agréable'. The wonderful ambiguity of the term 'commerce' — social, sexual, and commercial relations — emphatically throws into relief the hypocritical combination of disinterested friendship and social-sexual-commercial advantage that Dorante/Jourdain are pursuing in their relations with Dorimène and that the king is pursuing in his relations with the Porte.

The scene harks back to another instance in Molière's work where he is likely to have satirized the king. Virginia Scott has noted that many critics have seen references to Louis's affair with Louise de la Vallière in the *Princesse d'Élide* (1664) and to his affair with Françoise-Athénaïs de Rochechouart in *Amphitryon* (1668). She argues that, although the first instance may be a celebration of the king's adultery, the second is a satire of it.³⁰ The Marquise de Montespan's love of lavish living and jewellery was well known, and Dorante's arguments concerning Dorimène's conduct may have been an oblique critique of Montespan's tastes and the king's behaviour. The full list of expenditures that Jourdain has made for Dorimène reads like a page from the king's account book: frequent musical concerts, flowers, fireworks over water, dinners, divertissements, and, of course, jewellery.

However, 'commerce' is not limited to Jourdain's and Dorante's 'friendship' but also extends to the amorous relations between the characters of the comedy-ballet and the diplomatic relations between France and the Ottoman Empire. In the relations between the two pairs of lovers — Lucile/Cléonte and Nicole/Covielle — there is the constant threat of breaking all 'commerce'. After having been ignored by Lucile, Cléonte tells Covielle that he wants to 'rompre ensemble tout commerce' (II, 749). Covielle will shortly make the same threat to Nicole, exclaiming that he wants 'plus de commerce' with her (II, 752). The problems began in the previous scene (III. 8) when Nicole arrives as 'une ambassadrice de joie' but is rebuffed by Covielle, who then asks Nicole to inform her 'infidèle maîtresse qu'elle n'abusera de sa vie le trop simple Cléonte' (II, 747). The source of the problem, as we later learn, is that Lucile/Nicole publically ignored Cléonte/Covielle while walking with their chaperone, an old aunt who continually lectures the girls and 'nous figure tous les hommes comme des diables qu'il faut fuir' (II, 753). Cléonte is offended that 'un amant le plus fidèle' should be treated in such a demeaning manner. He fears that Lucile has been charmed by another lover, 'ce Monsieur le Comte', and vows to 'ne lui laisser pas toute la gloire de me quitter' (II, 749).

The troubled relations between the lovers parallel Franco-Ottoman relations. It was the threat of breaking off diplomatic relations by attempting to recall Haye-Vantelet that had provoked the Ottomans into sending Süleyman Ağa in the first place — a threat occasioned by the Porte's 'infidelity' in negotiating capitulations with the Genoese rather than the French. It was this threat, then, of breaking off 'commerce' that overshadows Süleyman's visit. On the most basic level, the question of fidelity plays on the notion of Muslims as 'infidels' or, from an Ottoman perspective, of Christians as 'gâvur' (giaour, infidel). Yet even on a purely religious level, it is unclear who the devil to be avoided is. The image of Louis's diabolical alliance with the Ottomans was literally pictured in a medal from 1691 showing the king in

³⁰ Virginia Scott, *Molière: A Theatrical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 156.

league with the sultan 'CONTRA CHRISTI ANIMUM'.³¹ However, faithlessness also played out on other levels. The French complained of the 'avanies' that their merchants experienced at Ottoman hands and the poor treatment of their diplomats. The Ottomans had more substantial complaints concerning French 'infidelity', since, even though France and the Ottoman Empire were allied, Louis XIV had first sent troops to fight against the Ottomans in their war with the Hapsburgs at the Battle of Saint Gotthard (1664), briefly took the Algerian coastal city of Jijel (1664), and sent troops to lift the siege of Candia (1669). Except for the first instance, French actions proved ineffective and, at the siege of Candia, disastrous, since they led to the death of François de Beaufort, the king's relative and commander of the French fleet, and to the fall of the island to the Ottomans in September, 1669, the French contingent having left the preceding month. Simply stated, the king's 'gloire' was not at its peak at this time. Perhaps the only 'gloire' left was not to allow the Ottomans to leave him first.

It was precisely at this moment that Mehmet IV decided to send Süleyman Ağa to France to resolve diplomatic difficulties. Although the king had earlier wanted to recall Haye-Vantelet, the Porte was not willing to allow the king the 'gloire' of having the current ambassador leave until a new one had been appointed. To sort out these issues, Kara Mustafa Pasha, who was serving as kaymakam while the Grand Vizier Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed was involved with the war in Candia, had at first indicated to the French that a full-fledged ambassador would be sent to France.³² In the end, the Grand Vizier decided that an officer of lower rank would deliver a letter to the king. Süleyman Ağa held the rank of *müteferrika*, which according to Halil İnalcık is 'one of an elite group in the Palace formed from the sons of pashas and vassal lords',³³ and is normally translated into French as 'Gentilhomme ordinaire du Roi', corresponding thus to an 'envoy'.

The French concern with the envoy's rank was probably heightened in light of the recent embassy sent to the Hapsburgs following the Treaty of Vasvar in 1664. The ambassador to the Hapsburgs was Kara Mehmed Pasha himself, the Rumeli Beylerbeyi. A beylerbeyi was the highest-ranking official in the Ottoman provincial government; Kara Mehmed was thus the head of the European (Rumeli) Ottoman province. Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed was particularly insistent that the ambassador 'must confront the Emperor [Leopold I] in fitting splendour and extravagance'.³⁴ The visit was meticulously prepared in advance. The Hapsburgs entrusted the complicated planning for the visit to Privy Councillor and Field Marshal Count Walter von Leslie. The Ottoman delegation contained over a hundred members who would need to be lodged and fed at every step of their trip. In addition, innumerable decisions needed to be worked out in advance concerning protocol and gift-exchanges.³⁵

³¹ Reproduced in Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 138.

³² Robert de Dreux, *Voyage en Turquie et en Grèce* ed. by Hubert Pernot (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1925), pp. 42–43, 135–36.

³³ Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300–1600* (1973) (London: Phoenix, 1994), p. 224.

³⁴ Caroline Finkel, *The History of the Ottoman Empire: Osman's Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), p. 269.

³⁵ Ekkehard Eickhoff, *Venedig, Wien und die Osmanen: Umbruch in Südosteuropa 1645–1700* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988), pp. 207–11.

However, d'Arvieux's account indicates that the French postponed decisions about how Lionne would receive the envoy until the last moment. The lack of planning was clearly responsible for many of the misunderstandings surrounding the visit on all sides. And the 'winner' of the visit was only too obvious. The French were unable to obtain the letter from Süleyman without allowing him to deliver it in person to the king, and when he did so, he shocked the French by requesting that the king stand to receive the letter and, more importantly, by remaining impassive before the splendour of the king and court. However, the Ottomans' primary goal of obtaining a new ambassador was achieved. Charles Olier, marquis de Nointel, ambassador from 1670 to 1679 would leave France at the same time as Süleyman himself.

Within this context of French weakness, it appears to me that the most trenchant and pointedly specific criticism of the king occurs in the Turkish ceremony itself (IV. 5). Although the ceremony contains the most direct references to 'quelque chose des habillemens & des manieres des Turcs', in fact there is precious little in the play that is authentically Turkish. However, the text of the ceremony is filled with elements closely associated with Louis XIV's reign. The ceremony opens by emphatically pointing to another highly contested policy: the protection of Christians living in Ottoman lands by the *Rex Christianissimus* ('Roi Très-Chrétien') and controversies concerning various factions of the Catholic Church within France itself. Louis XIV gave instructions to his ambassadors to look after Catholic interests in Ottoman lands; however, his position towards 'les hérétiques et les schismatiques' was decidedly less enlightened. The explicit instructions to Haye-Vantelet were to retake possession of as many Orthodox religious properties as possible and rededicate them for Roman Catholic use.³⁶

During the years directly preceding the production of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, numerous groups representing different theological tendencies within the Catholic Church troubled Louis's reign. The most notable of these movements included the powerful Counter-Reformation *Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement*. The problem of Jansenism loomed as well, including the acceptance of the formulary condemning five of Cornelius Jansen's propositions, to which all bishops finally subscribed only in 1688; finally, missions were organized in the late 1660s to convert the Huguenots. French policy towards Protestants, the 'religion prétendue réformée', in France itself was increasingly intolerant, including in relation to galley service. Approximately, 4% of the 38,000 men condemned to galley service between 1680 and 1748 were Protestant,³⁷ and the treatment of Protestant oarsmen and of renegades was reputed to be exceptionally severe in comparison to Muslim captives.³⁸ Jourdain's inquisition-like questioning, as Karro has noted, concerning his religious affiliation at the beginning of the Turkish ceremony may be intended to draw attention to the religious and crusading policies of the king.³⁹

As the ceremony continues, the Mufti prays to Mohammed and desires to make a 'paladin' of Jourdain. The paladins, of course, were the traditional companions of

³⁶ Duparc, *Recueil*, pp. 16–18; 60–62.

³⁷ André Zysberg, *Les galériens: Vies et destins de 60 000 forçats sur les galères de France 1680–1748* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. 111.

³⁸ Bamford, *Fighting Ships*, p. 11.

³⁹ Karro, 'La Cérémonie turque', pp. 64–69.

Charlemagne. The reference to Charlemagne provides an idealized model, and thus a model against which Louis's own reign might be compared, in at least three ways: as an exemplary military leader, as a crusader who nonetheless had relations with the Bagdad Caliphate of Harun Al-Rashid, and as the holder of the imperial title *Imperator Romanorum*. The reference to Charlemagne was explicitly exploited by Louis XIV throughout his reign, beginning with his coronation and anointing as king. For our purposes, the most relevant reference is to the traditional twelve paladins of Charlemagne in *Les Plaisirs de l'isle enchantée* (1664), in which the king played the role of Roger, Charlemagne's principal paladin. Basing the festivities in large part on Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* provided not only a context in which the king could pretend to be one of Charlemagne's paladins, but also provided a storyline with two plausible arenas for the exercise of the king's actual *gloire*: current Spanish possessions in the Low Countries and Muslim lands.

Action was taken in the first arena with the War of Devolution (1667–1668); action in the second had been attempted with the Duc de Beaufort's expedition to establish a base in North Africa at Jijel (Djidelli, Giger). However, attempts at 'crusade' seem to have been extremely half-hearted. McCluskey notes that, '[T]he government appears to have acted out something of a charade in its preparations for the Djidelli expedition, allowing Louis XIV to pose as a champion of Christianity while pursuing intrinsically commercial and political objectives'.⁴⁰ Contemporary writers also remarked on the charade-like character of Louis XIV's propaganda. Samuel Pepys noted in his diary on 11 October 1664 that,

This day, with great joy, Captain Titus told us the particulars of the Frenche's expedition against Giger, upon the Barbary Coast in the Straights, with 6,000 chosen men. They have taken the Fort of Giger, wherein were five men and three guns — which makes the whole story of the King of Frances policy and power to be laughed at.⁴¹

The reference to 'paladin', however, is connected to Louis most caustically and comically after the ceremony. Mme Jourdain, upon seeing Jourdain in his Turkish costume, wants to know the meaning of the charade. When Jourdain explains that he has been made a '*Mamamouchi*', meaning, he says, 'paladin' in French, she mishears the word as 'baladin', and wants to know if he is 'en âge de danser des ballets' (II, 772). The barb can be read as doubly pointed: the king's pretence of being one of Charlemagne's paladins is revealed as nothing more than the buffoon-like dancing of a 'baladin' and, even as an actual dancer, the king is reminded that he is now beyond his prime and no longer fit to dance in his own ballets. As the ceremony continues, the king's role as protector of the holy (Christian) sites in the Middle East is revealed to be yet another sham. To defend Palestine, Jourdain will be given 'turbanta' (turban) and 'scarcina' (scimitar), the very symbols of current Islamic control, along with 'galera é brigantine' (galley and brigandine), symbols both of Islamic power in the Mediterranean and of the primary tools with which Louis protected not the Holy Land but French economic interests in the Levant. Jourdain's *sacre* as paladin

⁴⁰ McCluskey, 'Commerce Before Crusade?', p. 9

⁴¹ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys 1664*, ed. by Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols (1995) (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), V, 295.

proceeds with the Mufti wanting to know whether he is a good Turk ('Star bon Turca Giourdina?'), to which the other 'Turks' respond with a resounding *Eyvallah* ('Hi valla'), one of the few authentic Turkish words used in the comedy-ballet (II, 770). The implication may be that Louis in his actions and policies has shown himself to be a better Turk than he is a Christian. In a sense, the king was twice faithless, both to the Ottomans by breaking treaties at Saint Gotthard, Jijel, and Candia, and to Christians by using his role as *Roi Très-Chrétien* primarily as a foil to pursue French commercial and political interests. The Mufti, in asking Jourdain whether he is a 'furba' (scoundrel) or a 'furfanta' (fraud), indirectly highlights the king's infidelity and deceptive posturing. To complete his 'coronation', Jourdain is finally given a 'turbanta' for a crown and a 'schiabbola' (sabre) for a sceptre. If the ceremony is read as a satirical and sartorial dressing-down of the king, then perhaps the last 'affront', the 'ultima affronta', is symbolically the most appropriate to indicate what the king truly deserves for his policies: a bastinado.

Numerous victims have been proposed as the target of Molière's satire in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*: Süleyman Ağa, the rising bourgeoisie, Colbert, or d'Arvieux. Yet such readings fail to take into account the profusion of references to the king himself and to governmental policies and actions. Although Louis XIV would certainly have liked it to have been otherwise, he was unable to exercise military, commercial, or diplomatic power over the Ottomans. The gap between rhetoric and reality provided Molière literally with an embarrassment of riches to exploit in the comedy-ballet. The number and blatancy of French gaffes, missteps, and outright failures could only be outmatched by the hubris of a 'monarque délirant d'orgueil', an expression used by Vandal to describe the sultans of the time,⁴² but which might more aptly be applied to Louis himself. Moreover, despite the frequent use of crusading imagery and themes, Louis appeared hypocritically to be more interested in pursuing commerce with the Ottomans and war with his European neighbours. If Molière indeed considered theatre to be a 'public mirror' in which vices were shown in order to be reproved and ultimately corrected, then *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* may reflect some of the king's mistaken policies. Perhaps what we see in the mirror is Louis as a would-be Turk.

Note on the contributor

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⁴² Vandal, *L'Odyssée d'un ambassadeur*, p. 2.